

The IRON CLAW

by ARTHUR STRINGER

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NOVELIZED FROM THE PHOTO PLAY OF THE SAME NAME

SYNOPSIS.

On Windward Island, Palidori, intrigues Mrs. Golden into an appearance of evil which causes Golden to capture and torture the Italian by branding his face and crushing his hand. Palidori opens the dyke gates and floods the island and in the general rush to escape the flood kidnaps Golden's six-year-old daughter, Margory. Twelve years later in New York a Masked One calling himself "The Hammer of God" rescues an eighteen-year-old girl from the cadet Casavanti, to whom Julius Legar had delivered her, and takes her to the home of Enoch Golden, millionaire, whence she is recaptured by Legar. Legar and Stein are discovered by Manley, Golden's secretary, setting fire to Golden's buildings, but escape.

THIRD EPISODE

THE COGNAC CASK

"Bring that woman in here!" commanded Enoch Golden as he flung open his library door. He stepped inside, the next moment, as the figure in black, pisioned close between young Manley and Wilson, the butler, was piloted into the shadowy room.

"Sit down!" he barked out at the silent and motionless figure with the heavy black veil still draping its face.

"Manley, is there any chance of this woman being armed?" Golden suddenly asked of his secretary.

"She's not armed, sir," was young Manley's quiet reply, "though it took a tussle before Wilson and I could get hold of her."

"Well," Golden said to the veiled figure in the chair, "what brought you spying and lurking about my home?"

That was a question which the woman apparently chose to leave unanswered.

"Do you intend to answer?" demanded the millionaire. "Or must I have you put out of this house without a hearing?"

"That seems to be a habit of which time has not deprived you," was the quietest reply.

It was not the muffled sting in those words, nor the calm bitterness with which they were spoken, but more the voice itself, with its ghostly reminder of other days, that brought Golden up short.

"Who are you?" he repeated when he saw that the veiled woman was alone in the room. "And why are you here?"

"You will misjudge that," answered the woman as she threw back the heavy folds of her veil, "as much as you misjudged my actions of twenty years ago!"

"Why are you here?" repeated Golden, with unconsciously hardening voice.

"It was love for my daughter!" The pugnacity went out of the grim face bent over the desk top.

"What do you know about—about your daughter?" he demanded, not meeting her gaze.

"I know that she is in danger, in terrible danger."

"That means you know where she is, where she could be found?" was Golden's quick inquiry.

"That is the one thing that made me brave enough, or cowardly enough,

times a foreigner or two comes in, mostly by accident. But yesterday, when I was in the kitchen, three men came in a hurry. They had dodged under cover there to escape being seen by a plain-clothes man. I could hear their talk through the little kitchen slide through which we pass our dishes. And when I heard their voices I opened the slide a little, and I knew at once that one of the men was Palidori, or Legar, as he calls himself now. He was talking mostly to a man called Casavanti. Then—"

"Wait a minute," interrupted Golden, with his finger on the bell button. "I want my secretary to hear this."

The woman in black sat silent until Manley had re-entered the room. Then Golden motioned for her to continue.

"I heard Legar mention your name," she went on, still unmoved by the older man's half-sneering incredulity.

"Then he blamed Casavanti for some scheme that had failed, some scheme to degrade my Margory. But he had the girl back, he said, and this time he'd expect Casavanti to do his part."

"Casavanti also said he wanted that woman for himself, and declared she'd come like a hungry cat when he'd finished with her. I knew then what he was. I knew what Legar was planning. It—it made me forget everything. I started for the table where they were. I tried to hold Legar. I—I think I called for help. I clung to him as he staggered toward the door. But one of his men struck me. They escaped, then, for I was too dazed to do anything more."

It was Manley who spoke next, an eager light in his scowling young eyes.

"But where did they say the girl was?" he asked.

"They did not say. But one of them spoke of Oyster Joe, who'd stolen some casks of old cognac. This man Oyster Joe was sending the casks by another man named Old Eli to some secret hiding place."

"But how can that help us?" asked Manley.

"I thought, with those names to work with, I might in some way find my child, find her and save her. Surely, with money, men could be hired—"

"Do you hear, Manley," broke in the grim-faced man of millions. "It's money again! It's always money!"

He wheeled about and confronted the tired-faced woman. "This is the second pretty story I've had to listen to lately. And, madam, I may as well tell you now that I don't believe a single word of it. Whether you're another come-on for that Cookson gang or not, I don't know. I don't even care. But I know that twenty years ago you deceived me, and lied to me. You robbed me of more than my home then. But you'll never do it a second time!"

The white-faced woman was also on her feet by this time.

"I have no wish to go back to the past," was her coldly-ennunciated reply. "I expect neither pity nor gen-

erosity from you. But when your own daughter is in danger, when you could save her, when—"

her voice broke as she saw the look of adamant on Golden's face. "Oh, it's no use; it's no use!" she cried sobbingly as she turned and groped her way towards the door.

It was not until that door closed behind her that Golden once more sank into his chair. And as he sat there, wrestling with his own tangled emotions before the dark tent of his soul, Manley stood staring down at him with both studious and puzzled eyes.

"For a man who counts his money in eight figures," that youth finally declared, "I think you're the most unmitigated ass that ever wore shoes leather!"

"What—what's that?" demanded the astounded millionaire.

"Why, man, are you blind? Can't you see this woman is sincere, that she's telling the truth, that she prob-

ably holds in her hand the key of all your future happiness?"

"The key to my happiness is no longer in that woman's hands," announced Golden. Yet a tremendous note in his great voice sent a wave of pity surging through the younger man, whose arm went out to the stooping shoulder so close to him. And that unexpectedly intimate touch, apparently, was too much for the already unnerved man at the desk, for with a gesture oddly poignant he lifted his hand and pressed it against his closed eyes, as though in an effort to shut away actualities which were too dark to be endured.

Manley, as he did so, slipped a hand in under the lapel of the older man's coat, lifted a wallet lightly from its pocket, and stood upright again. Then, with a shrug that was almost one of pity as he looked down at the still silent millionaire, he turned away and slipped out of the room.

The departing woman had already passed through the street door before he could overtake her. She stopped wonderingly at his call to her.

"Mr. Golden, madam, seems to have changed his mind. Here are a few hundred dollars from him, which may be of material assistance to you in this matter you spoke of."

Manley, who had taken the roll of bills from the wallet, was quite solemn-faced as he handed the money to the equally solemn-faced woman. Yet the shadow of a smile played about his lips as he watched the austere figure in black disappear from sight. Then he turned back to the library.

There he found Golden pacing back and forth, padding grotesquely about from pocket to pocket.

"Manley, my wallet's gone!" was the financier's cry.

"Was there any money in it?" inquired the secretary.

"What do you suppose I'd keep in it?" was the impatient demand. "Talcum powder? Of course there was money in it—over four hundred dollars in greenbacks!"

Manley shook his head in mock sorrow.

"This, sir, looks like very grave carelessness!"

"It looks like very grave thievery to me," snapped the older man.

The emissary in Oak.

Midway between that portion of New York harbor, known as the Upper bay, and the open reaches of the sea that wash up the sands of Manhattan beach, lies a district that might be fittingly denominated as No Man's land.

One of the least savory habitations adorning that fringe of a city's fens was the ruinous boathouse of a certain Oyster Joe.

And Oyster Joe, the river pirate, looked the part. The unsteadiness of his still muscular limbs, the looseness of his swollen lips, all united to proclaim him a lover of the cup that can cheer and at the same time inebriate.

This fact, indeed, was further evidenced by the earnestness with which Oyster Joe, himself making his way into the sail loft, lifted a worn tarpaulin aside and studied a row of cognac casks.

So intent was his study of this wealth of joy to be that he saw and heard nothing of a slender-bodied stranger who quietly approached his abode, entered it, and stared studiously about. What made this intruder even more mysterious was the fact that across the upper part of his face he wore a narrow band of yellow cloth.

The movements of this mysterious stranger were marked by celerity. When his investigations, in fact, were suddenly interrupted by a sound which grew louder along the narrow road winding inland through the salty marshes, he crept to the door, peered out and prepared himself for a promised intruder. For approaching Oyster Joe's boathouse he could plainly make out a two-horse wagon driven by a slattern-shouldered and white-bearded man of about sixty.

The masked intruder crept back through the boathouse, entered the sail loft and stealthily approached the still musing figure of Oyster Joe. In a moment he had the old pirate bound and gagged.

Then, hearing the wagon wheels almost at the door, the stranger dragged his inert captive to a nearby beam, lashed him to it and over him threw the tarpaulin from the cognac casks.

Slipping back to the outer rooms the masked stranger drew his revolver and stood close beside the shadow of the door, calmly waiting for the man who had already alighted from the wagon.

From the mouth behind the white whiskers came a squeak, like the squeak of a rat behind a wainscoting, as the stranger's revolver was thrust unexpectedly into his startled old face. Before he could quite recover from that initial shock of surprise a strand of rope was around his wrists and he was being backed unceremoniously away into the sail loft.

There, gagged and triced to a beam, he kept company with his rolling-eyed and equally mystified confrere, Oyster Joe. There he sat blinking about him as the masked stranger briskly rolled two of the cognac casks out to the waiting wagon, loaded them on the platform and as briskly drove away, taking with him both the time-worn hat and the bottle-green overcoat of the original driver of that wagon.

But before debouching from the open marshlands into the banister outskirts of South Brooklyn the audacious abductor of cognac had converted himself into a somewhat startling facsimile of the earlier owner and driver of the wagon.

He directed his course towards that subterranean haven of illicit beverages

known as the Owl's Nest, where Margory Golden was listlessly making preparations for the coming meal.

She started suddenly as she stooped over the fire smoldering in the blackened fireplace. For from a crevice in the wall, a crevice no bigger than a man's hand, a piece of mortar unmistakably flew out and struck her on the arm. She was still staring incredulously into this crevice when a flutter of white passed her eyes and a small square of paper fell at her feet close to the edge of the coal.

She unfolded the missive and read:

"A cask of cognac is coming. If Legar and his men drink from it they should be drugged asleep inside of ten minutes. Press spring concealed on top of cask and follow directions there. Don't give up. And if you understand this, tap twice with the fire tongs."

Below these words was the sign of the Laughing Mask.

So fortifying was this knowledge in fact, that when Casavanti and Legar himself entered the gloomily-lighted

lookout, with envious eyes on the cask.

"This is the real stuff! That raw dope's for Doolan's election workers!"

"And the bunch already soused with it!" commented the even more envious stickup as he helped roll the second barrel into Legar's inner quarters.

Slowly the two men carried out the barrel and lifted it to the wagon. Then the driver climbed aboard.

It was not until that driver was well away from the waterfront and had rounded many a corner, that he ventured to pull up and tap on the oak staves beside him.

"It's all right!" he called out as he felt about the rough oak and found the hidden spring. "Just hold steady now, and I'll help you out."

The girl uttered a sigh of thankfulness as they once more got under way.

The Race for Freedom.

Those two worthies known as Old Eli and Oyster Joe had, in their time, struggled with many knots. But nev-

er had they worked harder than over the knots of the mysterious stranger who had left them trussed and bound to the beams of their own sail loft.

They might, indeed, have remained gurgling and writhing there like two tethered copperheads while the careless tides rose and fell about them, had not one Scupulo visited Coney Island in his dilapidated car of ancient vintage, and having there conferred with a lush dip in hiding from the fannies of Manhattan, decided to circle homeward by way of Oyster Joe's, in the hope of that refreshment which had more than once cheered him on his dusty journeys.

Instead of finding refreshment, however, he unearthed two ferocious-eyed and dry-throated captives, who, when released, danced and gesticulated incoherently about their habitation. Then, when speech had returned to them the visit of the mysterious stranger was explained and the necessity of getting in touch with Legar made plain.

It was not long, accordingly, before three men and a car naively missing on one cylinder went coughing inland along the narrow road threading those uncounted acres of sea marsh.

They were within fifty paces of a cross-roads landmark known as Chimney-Pot Corner when a fellow not unlike that of a branded range steer burst from the indignant throat of Old Eli. For that worthy had the unique experience of beholding not only his own purloined team and wagon, but a disconcertingly lifelike replica of himself driving it. Scupulo, with the genius of a true general, arrested the progress of that wagon by promptly stopping his car directly in its track.

This collision in no way improved the vehicle of ancient vintage; but sterner issues were at hand. A moment later the belligerent trio from the broken car were triumphantly charging for Margory Golden and her guardian.

That guardian, fully realizing the meaning of the charge, tossed his reins to the frightened girl and commanded her to drive for all she was worth. Then he himself prepared for invaders.

It was to the first comer that he directed his main attention, for Scupulo, he noticed, already held a knife in his swarthy hand. One well-placed kick on the clenching knuckles, however, sent that glimmering icicle of steel circling off into the road-dust, and an equally well-placed blow on the jaw sent the owner of the knife after it.

In the meantime, however, both Oyster Joe and Old Eli had gained the wagon platform. The former found himself suddenly clenched by the waist and lifted clear of the wagon. Why he should so quickly and so violently come into collision with the swaying figure of Oyster Joe, like an alley ball hitting a nine-pin, was a matter which for all time remained a mystery to him. But over the side of the thundering wagon the two figures suddenly toppled, rolling along the dust with limbs interlaced and clawing hands unreasonably clenched in each other's hair. And before they regained either their feet or their menial faculties, the wagon itself was well on its way.

Yet the driver of that wagon knew that his escape was only a temporary one.

"And what's that?" demanded the

room, Margory Golden no longer cringed at the sound of their voices.

Casavanti, walking over to her, turned her face to the light. He peered at it hungrily, from half-closed eyes.

"Legar," he called out to that worthy, who had remained at the door to warn his stickup to admit nobody but immediate members of their band.

"I like the spirit in this girl. She's as sleek as a she-panther."

Legar's stickup dodged in through the door.

"Say, chief, there's an outsider tryin' to butt in here!"

Both men promptly wheeled about at those somewhat disconcerting words.

"Who is he?" was Legar's quick query.

"An' ol' boob wit' a bar'l o' brandy. Says he's driven in from Oyster dump!"

Legar looked relieved. Casavanti even lighted another cigarette.

"That's all right. It's Old Eli. Help him in with it. But see that nobody else gets near that outside door."

"There's always help around, Casavanti, in a case like this," proclaimed the scuffling Legar as a white-whiskered old figure in bottle-green coat and hat laboriously rolled the cask of liquor through the opened door. The Owl, with unlooked-for nimbleness in one of her years, was already close at hand, waiting with bung starter and glasses.

Margory watched the suddenly clamorous group as they clustered about the open barrel. Her heart sank as glasses were refilled and the clamor, instead of diminishing, grew louder and louder.

Then, even as she stood depressed and troubled by this thought, a soft pedal seemed to be slowly applied to the tumult about her. The soporific Owl herself, stumbling to a chair, sank inertly into it. Then one after another they sank into dreamless stupor.

It was then, and only then, that Margory dared to move. She studiously stared at that uncouth company of sleepers. Then, no longer watching them, but with her eyes on the door through which their lookout might at any moment appear, she groped her way to the side of the barrel. There she felt about the blackened oak barrel top for the hidden spring. A gasp of relief escaped her lips as she found it. The covering fell back on its concealed hinge, and floating inside it she found a white pine shaving on which was written:

"Turn barrel and empty it. Then get in and replace cover. All will be well."

The stickup so covertly yet so disconsolately watching for any suspicious approach to Legar's watertight quarters, was astonished, a few minutes later, to behold the white-whiskered old man in the bottle-green coat once more drive up to the door of the Owl's nest.

"Hi, you, gimme a hand with this bar'l!" that bewickered driver commanded.

"What have you got this time?" inquired the watchman.

"I was bonehead enough to leave the wrong cask with the chief! Stung him with thirty gallons of 'cooking sherry' that's about one-half wood alcohol!"

He directed his course towards that

being followed," was the stranger's answer. "Then I'll tell you!"

The girl stared back along the dusty roadway. But along that roadway was nothing to be seen.

What she saw when she turned again, though, was a gray wig and a fringe of yellowish-white whiskers lying in the bottom of the wagon.

And when she lifted her eyes to the stranger's face she beheld on that face, suddenly rejuvenated, the narrow band of a yellow mask, a yellow mask which covered the eyes and the upper part of the head. But below the mask, intimidating as it was in its mystery, she could see that the mouth was a smiling one.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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"I Could Hear Their Talk Through the Little Kitchen Slide."

to come to you. I do not know where she is. But I know that she can be found!"

"So you have a suspicion where she is?"

"Yes," acknowledged the patient-eyed woman.

"What are those suspicions founded on?"

"On certain words which I overheard, words spoken by a very evil man."

"What is that man's name?"

"He is a one-armed man, named Legar."

Golden half rose from his chair. "So you and Legar are still comrades, I see!" he cried, turning the blade of hate in that still open wound of pride.

"Legar and I never were comrades. For years I have kept a little restaurant for art students and shopgirls, just off Washington square. It is near the Italian quarter there. Some-

erosity from you. But when your own daughter is in danger, when you could save her, when—"

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